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Imagine

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Trumpeter

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HARVEY SCOTT is a Professor Emeritus with the Department of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta where he taught Outdoor Education within the socio-cultural realm of inquiry and co-ordinated Explorations for 15 years. Harvey can now be found arguing for ecological sustainability over the pulp and paper industries interest from his farm in Athabasca, Alberta. There he is often seen at the manure pile with Jake the dog as his thou debating the merits of the existential quest to realize one's identity with the nonhuman other.

It is the winter of 1994, more than two years before the first trip will actually depart for the mountains in a program that will come to take its place among the experiences and faces of Explorations history.<sup>2</sup> The living and learning of what will become Explorations '96 is not yet, cannot yet, be known.

During the next 24 months we will work as we have never worked before. Merely raising the funds needed - \$16,000 plus - would be a daunting task, but it would never seriously be questioned whether we would do it, only how it was to be done. We would have some huge successes; grant proposals, Thursday bake sales and Adopt-an-Explorer would bring in more than \$9,000. And we would have smaller successes: selling hot dogs and frozen cans of Coke in a November snowstorm outside Revy [hardware store] will net us \$1.25.

Explorations would come to test us. Of course, it would test us physically - that is always a given in these experiences for some reason. But it would also come to test us mentally, emotionally, socially and, at times, spiritually.

We would have to organize gear, learn skills in map reading and emergency first aid, as well as become competent in the techniques of back country skiing and sea kayaking. We would plan menus, dry food, pack food, get physically fit, research area history, geography, and geology, environmental issues, political issues, social issues, arrange logistical support, plan routes, sew clothes, read tide charts, and so on. In the midst of this we would have to learn and re-learn what it takes to create a rewarding, educational experience within a consensus-based social structure, a culture of our own making. We would try to make decisions that were acceptable to all in a process that eats time and in which frustration and satisfaction can become synonymous. We would have to develop an ethic of caring that seeks a balance between our personal goals and group needs. We would find virtually every aspect of every task infused with the meanings and implications of our adopted social process.

We would come to learn of maps and getting lost and getting found again. Of cold: cold feet, cold hands, cold face, cold legs, cold, cold arms, cold head ... numb mind. Of the attraction between ice and hair, and between cold ski poles and wet tongues. But partly from these things we will learn of the beauty and

stillness of a frozen world, and will come to a truer understanding of the value of things hot and things chocolate. We would glimpse proud cultures of the west coast, peering through the ancientness as though through untold fathoms of clear, but constantly shifting waters. We would find ourselves trying to piece together the meaning of the story of a people and a land, just as others will try to feel the meaning of our experience when we tell it ages hence.

We would come to learn of cooperation and conflict among, between, and in us. We would come to learn of death, of sudden loss, of grief, and of the crawling pace of healing.<sup>3</sup> We would also discover the power of shared laughter and senseless, but profound joy. We would come to know the comfort and serenity of special places and special people, human and otherwise.

But it is still 1994 and all that is yet to come.<sup>4</sup> There are more immediate concerns. Where will we go? What kind of trip will it be? I know these people I am to share my dreams with, but do not *know* them. And the wisdom of lived time has not yet decided to reveal to me that the greatest exploration I will accomplish in the next two years will be of myself.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. This article was originally a speech written and delivered by Explorations member Brent Cuthbertson to a public gathering meant as a celebration and closure to the Exploration Program in 1996.

2. Explorations is an interdisciplinary curricular senior undergraduate option within the Department of Physical Education at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. The program began in 1981 as an early model in expeditionary interdisciplinary field learning in higher education. At its core is the belief in the potential for a deep ecological education. Such an education can be accessible with time apart from conventional schooling and one's urban context through a fully functional group living experience with wild places well explored. The exploration is one of self, others and place. Exploration creator and advisor Harvey Scott wrote of Explorations in the mid 1980's:

Julian Smith's definition of outdoor education as education *in* and *for* the out-of-doors has served us well for many years. Given the imminent need to dramatically revise our environmental worldview and to turn around our treatment of our planet's biosphere, all aspects of our education need critical review and revision. All education and outdoor education in particular need to become a deep ecological education both in terms of goals and in process. Such an education would use active, learner-directed, explorations as direct educational experience in, for, and most importantly *with* the outdoors. This

deep ecological approach to learning would result in an environmentally activist citizen who sees self as an equal partner with nature. A deep ecological ethic and world view suggests a radically different model for education.

Students plan and carry out one or more travel experiences as a focus to academic inquiry, self-directed learning projects and group living. Explorations in 1994 through to 1996 developed course content, organized and travelled in 1996 by cross country skis from Jasper (Maligne Lake) to the Banff townsite over one month and seven mountain passes. Later that year they spent six weeks traveling by sea kayak along the shoreline of the Queen Charlotte Islands exploring the rich cultural heritage of the area. Previous exploration travels have included a canoe trip from Rocky Mountain House on the North Saskatchewan to historic Fort William near Lake Superior following the old voyageur fur trade route, dog sledding in the Northwest Territories, a historical retracing of the Methye Portage/Clearwater River route by snowshoe, and canoeing the Wabasca River to the Peace River.

Related inquiry, depending on the particular area of travel and individual interests, have focussed on the historical, natural history and socio-political issues. All Explorations programs have involved healthy degrees of group process facilitation, experiential learning methodologies, outdoor travel and living skills, physical fitness training, journal writing and a major aspiration towards increasing one's understanding of being part of one's natural community.

3. Tragically, one group member was killed in a car accident during the planning phase of Explorations 94/96.

4. Program supervisor Dr. Harvey Scott referred to the 1994/96 Explorations crew in a recent letter (November 1996): "I wanted to let you know how proud I have been to be associated with your brave and happy band of existential voyageurs. If, as it seems, this is to be the penultimate Exploration, you are a most fitting finale to a unique and radical experiment in libratory self education. Each crew has seized the Explorations opportunity in their own right and painted their own unique vision on the Western Canadian landscape. Yours has been remarkable in a number of ways - most obviously in the scope and grandeur of the adventures and wild places you explored ... I guess for me your greatness has been in your remarkable development as a fully functioning family willing and able to see each other through the good times and bad. Your team motto could easily have been, "From each according to your ability, to each according to your need."

5. Harvey Scott, in a January 1997 letter to the Editors: "My main concern for Explorations has always been that I have trouble deciding whether Explorations groups ever get beyond the human self - human other phase of self realization. Again, although I seem to see people moving to more "deep ecological conscious-

ness” in different and unique ways, there does seem to be more of a maturation of a civic engagement evolution. This can be characterized as an ethical expansion from obsession with survival, to self as bones and marrow, to self as human/group/ family/community member and then to self as being amongst the diversity of plant and animal creatures’ community of being.”

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